

**STATE AND MINORITY IN TRANSYLVANIA,
1918–1989**

**Studies on the History of
the Hungarian Community**

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Preface to the Series

The present volume is a component of a series that is intended to present a comprehensive survey of the history of East Central Europe.

The books in this series deal with peoples whose homelands lie between the Germans to the west, the Russians, Ukrainians and Belorussians to the east, the Baltic Sea to the north and the Mediterranean and Adriatic Seas to the south. They constitute a particular civilization, one that is at once an integral part of Europe, yet substantially different from the West. The area is characterized by a rich diversity of languages, religions and governments. The study of this complex area demands a multidisciplinary approach, and, accordingly, our contributors to the series represent several academic disciplines. They have been drawn from universities and other scholarly institutions in the United States and Western Europe, as well as East and East Central Europe.

The editor-in-chief is responsible for ensuring the comprehensiveness, cohesion, internal balance and scholarly quality of the series that he has launched. He cheerfully accepts these responsibilities and intends this work to be neither justification nor condemnation of the policies, attitudes and activities of any person involved. At the same time, because the contributors represent so many different disciplines, interpretations, and schools of thought, our policy in this, as in the past and future volumes, is to present their contributions without major modifications.

THE LIQUIDATION OF THE TRANSYLVANIAN ARISTOCRACY AS REFLECTED IN MEMORY¹

The change of 1989–1990 everywhere in East Central Europe brought with it the “liberation” of memory as well. In the recent past several volumes – diaries, memoirs and interviews – have appeared, which according to popular belief erect a monument to a social stratum that has vanished into history forever: the aristocracy.² In these the members of the former elite (who almost without exception live/lived abroad, and many of whom have died in the meantime) or their descendants attempted to shape the dramatic events of the twentieth century, as well as their own human drama, into a coherent, comprehensible story, in which the “aristocratic values” and ethos received a distinguished role. By examining them I wish to illuminate the political cataclysms of the twentieth century and the destruction of the Transylvanian aristocracy from the viewpoint of collective memory.³

The fact that we are dealing with heterogeneous sources makes the examination difficult. From the methodological point of view the biographies and memoirs are distinguished from the interviews. The latter, moreover, were not prepared by experts using the methods of oral history, but generally by journalists or amateurs interested in the aristocracy’s past. From the substantial number of ego-documents, I analyzed first and foremost those that originate from persons who remained in Romania, or, if the persons in question had emigrated in the meantime, the documents that refer to their experiences at home. Likewise we must distinguish the recollections of people who experienced the events as adults from those detailing childhood experiences. Below, based on an analysis of the narrative structure of some 30 ego-documents, I try to sketch the attitude of the Transylvanian aristocracy to the events after the First World War, the Communist dictatorship, and

the collapse of their own world. I also examine how they tried to adapt to the changed circumstances, how they processed the trauma suffered and how the changed situation influenced the shaping of their identity. It is true of almost all the narrators that they move between the individual and the collective memory; they also make references to the official discourse contemporary with the narrative, although critically, since they experienced the political and social changes as a threat to their identity.

In Transylvania aristocratic titles appeared only following the incorporation of the autonomous principality into the Habsburg Empire, at the end of the seventeenth century; then during the eighteenth century several families received baronial and comital titles. Among these we find families that had played a leading role during the era of the autonomous principality and *homines novi* alike. The majority of them, however, had local roots and were Hungarian, and the few immigrant high nobles also assimilated into them. At the start of the nineteenth century some 24 baronial and 23 comital clans lived in Transylvania; these, however, had much more modest wealth than the aristocrats in Hungary proper. Despite this, they preserved their political role up until the First World War. In Transylvania during the Dualist period, too, we find aristocrats in quite large numbers among the lord lieutenants (*főispánok*) and parliamentary deputies.

It was at the end of the First World War that the great political turnabout in the history of the Transylvanian aristocracy occurred, the one that brought about the liquidation of their political and economic power and forced them to work out new survival strategies.⁴ For them, too – just as for the whole of Transylvanian Hungarian society – the lost war and the Treaty of Trianon (1920) represented the initial shock. A part of the Transylvanian aristocracy chose Hungary and left their native land. Several among them played a significant role in the political life of Hungary, such as Prime Minister Count István Bethlen or the minister of foreign affairs, Count Miklós Bánffy, who later chose to return home. With the 1921 land reform, during which the vast majority of the

lands held by the Transylvanian Hungarian large landowners were expropriated from them, the Romanian government aimed among other things at specifically altering the estate structure in terms of ethnicity.⁵ The so-called “Optants” moreover lost their entire estates. In the new Romanian nation state the Transylvanian Hungarian high nobility were not allotted a role in politics either; however, despite the breaking of their property status, through their social capital and prestige in local society, as well as in Hungarian nationality policy and public life and public bodies – including the leadership of the Transylvanian Hungarian Party coming into existence as well – they still played an important role.

The majority of the authors of the analyzed texts either lived through the end of the First World War only as children or were born after the war and grew up in Romania. Although they considered the terms of the Treaty of Trianon and the loss of the great part of their estates to be a blatant injustice, despite this for them the period between the two world wars – especially in the light of later events – meant a period of prosperity and stability. Count Mihály Teleki (born 1908) discussed the negative consequences of the agrarian reform, but afterwards sketched at length how together with his father he attempted to modernize the remaining land.⁶ It was particularly for those living through the era as children that this period was seen as a lost paradise. “We were free, freer than a bird,” was how one elderly aristocratic lady recalled her childhood.⁷ Yet another begins her recollections of her childhood thus: “Back, back to our carefree spring, back to Kolozsvár!”⁸

But soon even greater traumas awaited the members of the Transylvanian aristocracy than what they had had to experience in the wake of the First World War. The Second Vienna Award (1940) divided up Transylvania between Hungary and Romania. Among the deputies from Northern Transylvania invited into the Hungarian Parliament the aristocrats once again were overrepresented. Even if their political influence was much greater than it had been in Romania, they did not get back their estates expropriated during the Romanian land reform. It is interesting that despite the fact that

they welcomed the Vienna Award and the reannexation of Northern Transylvania to Hungary, in the memoirs the joy finds only very subdued expression. Overshadowed by the subsequent events, they recall mostly those moments during which they attempted to prevent or at least soften ethnic tensions between Hungarians and Romanians and/or Jews, and almost always emphasize their outsider status with regard to official politics, and their apolitical stance. Mihály Teleki related several such stories, for example, how he had prevented the authorities from arresting the Romanian village constable, or how he had helped one of his Jewish acquaintances, who was shut up in the ghetto, with food.⁹ The protagonists who are portrayed negatively in these little stories are almost always Hungarians from the "mother country." Countess Gabriella Kornis wrote the following of the civil servants from the "mother country," the "foreigners": "The contempt is mutual, as is the cordial smile."¹⁰ A recurrent motif of her writing is the idealized patriarchal relations that had tied her family to the Romanian village, and the despair felt over the destruction of these. "We silently lament the village, the village that will never again be what it was," she wrote.¹¹ In her opinion once again only the "foreigners" were the ones responsible for this: before the war the extreme right-wing agitators from the "Regat" – that is, from beyond the Carpathians – and then the partition of Transylvania. The family considered the reannexation of Northern Transylvania to be a fleeting glory that had fatefully divided the people. "Your flag and mine are different," a Romanian peasant woman told her in the autumn of 1940, and then asked, "Are we enemies now?"¹² Also eloquent is the tragicomic scene when the comital family drives out in the long unused carriage with liveried footman, dressed in ceremonial attire, to greet the entering Hungarian troops, and her 19-year-old brother, raising his sword high, exclaims in Romanian, turning towards the people of the village, "Noroc" (Good luck). To this the narrator commented as follows: "I tried not to see the face of the village, not to hear its silence, but I could feel that out of the ribbons in national colors, the ceremonial Hungarian attire taken out of the mothballs, and

shiny clasps, a strong, indestructible wall was now slowly growing between the village and us, an unbroken wall."¹³

The role of the nobility – and especially the high nobility – in village society was similar in Transylvania to that in Germany east of the Elbe, where even at the start of the twentieth century there was a close connection between the aristocracy and its landed estate and the inhabitants of the village. This connection was obviously loosened after the First World War, and then the Second World War sealed the process, but several participants experienced this painful process as the fall of their former world.

The years 1944–1945 represented a further break, a further reversal of fate, when once more vital decisions had to be made. The majority of the aristocrats fled from Transylvania in the face of Soviet troops. During the flight they experienced and survived various adventures. Again they experienced the situation as the failure of the previous value system: "Where is that norm, that life principle, upon which we could build our life, which could fill our soul? Everything that until now we had considered to be good and unshakeable is beginning to sway and crumble into dust. Christian religion, the sanctity of family life, and the love of work deriving from property are all branded as obsolete and incorrect. But what will tomorrow bring in place of these?" wrote a then young count to his friend in the summer of 1944.¹⁴

By the autumn of 1944 the Romanian administration had once more returned to Northern Transylvania, and after 1945 Romania came under Soviet influence. The turnaround at the same time ultimately sealed the fate of the aristocracy as well. The majority emigrated in time, while those who remained at home counted as class enemies. Those whose assets and castles had not been destroyed during the war would witness such destruction later. The expropriation of their property was accompanied in fact by the systematic destruction of valuables. Some had been arrested earlier, and then in March 1949 the rest were rounded up and forcibly resettled. By this time they had no room to maneuver whatsoever in the totalitarian dictatorship; years of complete helplessness followed.

For those who had emigrated still earlier, separation from the native land meant a traumatic experience. Some consciously prepared for this: "In the final weeks I became increasingly more aware; my eyes photographed razor-sharp images so that [everything] would be preserved... that I might recall all that signified my childhood at any time, that I might recall it indelibly," wrote Countess Gabriella Kornis, who was forced to leave her native land very young. She then continued: "As I stepped out of our gate for the last time, I already knew then that no matter what direction my path would take me, I would stumble deafly and blindly in an alien world; no one would understand my speech, and nor would I that of others."¹⁵ According to psychologists, in emigration the process of idealizing the distant good is at work; then "emigration diminishes the intrapsychic trauma by projecting it onto the social sphere, and then replaces it with another: separation, the subsequent mourning, and adaptation."¹⁶ The well-known author Count Albert Wass, who after the war emigrated to the United States of America, expressed his homesickness as follows: "It is impossible to forget Transylvania. Who could forget Transylvania? Not even the foreigners. Even they remember Transylvania."¹⁷ Despite the forced separation from the native land they attempted to preserve the Transylvanian identity in part or in whole. "Even today I am Transylvanian," declared Albert Wass even decades later.¹⁸ This strong local patriotism can be observed among others as well, and is frequently emphasized even *vis-à-vis* those from Hungary. Gabriella Kornis also attempted throughout her entire life to maintain her Transylvanian identity, which was largely based only on memories, and which she perceived as threatened.

In the memoir literature of nobles who fled or were chased from eastern Prussia, too, an honored place is occupied by the continuity of that harmonious, paternalistically arranged world, in which social welfare is allotted an important role, and which interweaves even the most harrowing situations. For the noble families from there, too, the bond with the surroundings/region was an important part of family tradition,¹⁹ just as we have already seen in the case

of the Transylvanians as well. The Transylvanian aristocrats also constantly emphasize the solicitude shown towards the villagers and to those in need generally. They were likewise proud that, as one count living today in Germany writes, the "castles were always bearers of culture as well."²⁰ Another constantly recurring motif is the love of nature, the close bond with the country rather than the town. "Unfortunately after 1945 I became a town-dweller, but I could not forget the spell of nature, the concert of bird songs, the richness of the woodland flowers and the assorted game of the forests," writes Count Sándor Degenfeld-Schonburg.²¹

Whoever did not return home saw his leftover lands, immovable and movable property confiscated and come under joint Soviet-Romanian management through CASBI (*Casa de Asigurare si Supraveghere a Bunurilor Inamice* or *Ellenséges Javakat Ellenőrző és Felügyelő Pénztár*, "Institution for the Supervision of Enemy Belongings," created formally on February 10, 1945, by the Decree of Law Nr. 10 of the Romanian Government).²² On the other hand, difficult times awaited those who remained or returned. In most cases the motivation was attachment to the leftover property, as well as to the native land and family traditions, or possibly the wishes of the elderly parents. "Many more returned to Transylvania than to Hungary. Here the attraction is somehow stronger, local patriotism is somehow greater," Mihály Teleki wrote, once more emphasizing the aforementioned regional bond and identity. At that time he thought thus: "My ancestors weathered the Turks, the Tatars, 1848 [the Revolution]; why should I be the one to run away? This is somehow inherited or born with us; I don't even know what else to call it but local patriotism..."²³ "If the Telekis endured it for three hundred years, we will endure this, too – or so we thought."²⁴

Katalin Bethlen recounted how her uncle had returned to Transylvania because "his place was there," then added: "He went home to Transylvania a beggar."²⁵ The uncle, Count Béla Bethlen, had been the government commissioner for Northern Transylvania in 1944, and after the war he stubbornly insisted on returning home, even though on the first occasion he was arrested and sent back to

Hungary. Despite this, he returned a second time as well, and only now did his Calvary truly begin. He was arrested several times, interrogated and finally sentenced to nine years' imprisonment. In 1952 they offered to let him resettle in Hungary, but he chose to stay even then: "I, after a brief time to reflect, decided in favor of Transylvania, since it was here that I was born, here that I lived most of my life, and I felt a certain moral obligation to share the fate of my approximately two million Hungarian brothers who were stranded here."²⁶ Afterwards he was held captive without judicial sentence in the various prisons of Romania under terrible circumstances. He spent a year and a half in solitary confinement where he could not see even the prison guard. He described his prison experiences with a certain degree of detachment and humor, despite the fact that several times his life hung by a thread. The parts of the punishment most difficult to bear – this is true in the case of other similar recollections, too – were the miserable hygienic conditions and the lack of "privacy" (body searches, during which their mouth cavity and rectum were also searched, the lack of a separate place to sleep, and so on). Bearing all this without a word of complaint, however, was part of the aristocratic ethos. Béla Bethlen's conclusion was that those who were faint of heart in prison did not survive it; self-discipline, as well as faith and humor, helped him.

If the fate of the others was not this dramatic, they, too, nevertheless received more than their share of sufferings and humiliations. The first shock that they had to confront after their return home was generally the looting of the castle and the destruction of the park. Many "objects of irreplaceable historical and artistic value" were lost, as one of the interview subjects said. This recurs in each memoir and interview: not even in their old age were they able to process the senseless destruction. "In Szentbenedek in October 1944 the senseless destruction began: irreplaceable valuables were destroyed, several thousand volumes were caught on the Szamos dam, and the unicorns guarding the gate stood beheaded. The park ravaged, our gravestones toppled over, the drinking trough placed across my mother's grave."²⁷ "Why? Why did you do it? What good

was the vandalism? For you could have taken away everything that had been ours, you could have been rich – why was it necessary to destroy chapel, picture, garden, book, statue, house, flower, why?" asked Countess Kornis rhetorically after half a century had passed.²⁸

Everything, therefore, had to be started all over again, and most actually did begin to work the remaining land without animals or tools. By the time that they had recovered, however, the next blow came. By Party decree on the night of March 2–3, 1949, the so-called "exploiters" were rounded up and deported with one piece of hand luggage to their assigned dwelling. The decree affected everyone this time, without distinction by nationality. "... and this was that moment when the family lost everything in the strict sense of the word. What started then would last fifty years. What is painful in this historical process is not the loss of the silver spoons, but how individual human fates were forced to evolve," commented Countess Katalin Mikes.²⁹ She happened to be at home with her grandmother, and because they could not hear the knocking, the door was broken in on them. Frightened, her grandmother protested that they had no money, but they could take from the pantry whatever they could find. To this the men began to explain that they were "nationalizing," whereupon her grandmother replied with astonishment: "So you are not burglars?"³⁰

The note stamped into their personal identification document "for a decade and a half restricted their room to maneuver and their opportunities to apply for an apartment and a job."³¹ The forcibly assigned dwelling in every case was a miserable room without any conveniences, a basement apartment, a barn, a field guard's hut on the edge of town, where water had to be brought from two kilometers away, or something similar. This was made worse by the difficulties of finding work: the "exploiters," despite their diplomas and doctoral degrees often earned abroad, could perform only the most menial physical work, but this was not simple to find either. We could quote from the various reminiscences at length, but here let a single typical episode suffice: in the case of the abovementioned Mikes

family the author's mother had to support her five-year-old daughter and her 78-year-old sick mother, but found only hard physical work in a sand quarry. Her daughter quotes a letter written by her mother to the authorities, which closed with the following formula: "I am glad that I may work and that with my work I may contribute to the reconstruction. Long live the Romanian People's Republic!"³² In the socialist countries the main goal of the official "identity policy" after the war was to impose on people, instead of the multifaceted identity stolen by force, a uniform identity pattern; a chasm thereby formed between public and private forms of identity – as this previous quote also shows.³³ However, her mother was soon taken away to Dobruđa to perform forced labor; the absurd charge was that together with 70 other companions she had obstructed collectivization.³⁴ The little girl stayed with acquaintances and lived apart from her mother even after the latter's return home, even when both lived in Kolozsvár, since her mother lived with several others in the same room and could not take her daughter there. We could sketch other similar fates, but this illustrates the atmosphere of the Communist dictatorship of the 1950s well. Later the situation improved somewhat: the former "exploiters" on the whole continued to perform physical labor, but finding work no longer caused such difficulty, chicanery was not an everyday occurrence, and in the difficult situation they tried to help themselves generally by teaching languages, profiting from the multilingualism fashionable among the aristocracy.

Some recounted the solidarity of those around them, while others on the contrary talked rather about how great the fear was and complained that they lived practically as outcasts. "Everyone was afraid to communicate with us. At the end of the week we went by bus out to the edge of the city and walked out into the nearby woods, to forget the city with its own troubles, and we imagined ourselves back in that village environment in which we grew up." Illusion was needed for survival, and thus when conditions had stabilized they often attended operas and operettas, where for two or three hours they forgot about their misery: "We recalled that elegant world into which we had been born, and we maintained in ourselves

the hope that it would return."³⁵ Countess Éva Bethlen together with her husband rented a garden and sold vegetables in the market: "We got used to it, we accepted our fate. We knew that we must live, and for us to live, we must work. I was never ashamed of work, and I was brought up to know how to accomplish everything."³⁶ She accepted her fate, but it was much more difficult to bear the discrimination against the children; she, too, was most hurt by how her children's fate evolved: her daughter was removed from the school at the age of ten, while her son, despite his talent, could not become a student at the music school. "They kicked all of us wherever they could. They tried to break us, to constantly humiliate us. We bore it, we knew why everything was happening, but it was quite hard for the children to bear it."³⁷

The fate of the children was the most difficult, since the experience of stigmatization formed an important part of their socialization. They did not understand the situation, but felt that they were different from the other children. Countess Ilona Bethlen was not allowed to study either: "That is when I learned the word: *class alien*. It taught me a bitter lesson. Even now, in my advanced age I regret that I could not continue my studies..."³⁸ The attitude of the teachers varied: the "old teachers" generally showed understanding, whereas the "activists" on the other hand made the children, too, feel the class struggle. The parents experienced the discrimination against their children with much more difficulty than their own terrible situation. The most serious discriminatory measure, one impacting their entire future, was exclusion from education. Regardless of their academic achievements, the fact was that the children of the "class enemy" could not continue their studies, and every form of higher education was closed to them. With this the regime wanted to prevent them from possibly attaining a higher social status once more. After the seven years of elementary school, which were compulsory for every child, often even continued study in a vocational school was prevented. But the search for jobs also encountered great difficulties, and most of the time young persons, too, were hired only for difficult physical work. With the softening

of the dictatorship in the 1960s, the severity abated somewhat, and at that time youths of aristocratic descent, too, were now allowed to complete secondary school as well. For the longest time they were barred from college and university training. This is clearly exemplified by the case of Count Mihály Teleki's children as well. The oldest of his four children, who as a child "still enjoyed the advantages of the landowner's existence," became a locksmith, while the second, a girl, was taken out of the eighth grade of the elementary school as a "class enemy," worked from the age of 14 at a construction firm and graduated from an evening school. However, for copying an anti-regime leaflet, a military court sentenced her, barely eighteen years old, to fifteen years' imprisonment; in addition, her father was also taken away to the Danube Canal to do forced labor. For seven years she was not allowed to receive letters; after seven years she was released ill and broken. To the question about how his wife bore their daughter's trial, the reply was "She sat and remained silent. As befits a lady born a Tisza."³⁹ The dispassionate voice with which Teleki narrated his and his children's fate sounds almost cruel. Control over emotions was deeply inculcated into the members of the aristocracy, which Calvinist Puritanism only strengthened more. When the children attempted to continue their studies or take on a job far from their birthplace, where nothing was known about the family's past, they had more success. The fate of the two younger children is also interesting, and it exemplifies well how it was possible to outwit the regime's absurd decrees. The third daughter was removed from the school prior to graduation, but at that time went to acquaintances in the southern part of Romania, where in the purely Romanian region the historical-sounding family name was unfamiliar and she graduated easily, and then completed first technical school, and later university. The youngest boy was adopted by an acquaintance in the southern part of Transylvania; thus under a different name he too could complete university without hindrance.⁴⁰

The parents tried to protect the children; one strategy was to keep silent. One quite young representative of the above-mentioned Tisza family said the following:

No one initiated us... into the painful insider secrets of our family and history. You know, in Communist Romania my father and grandfather were hurt too many times for having been born Tiszás. From this it followed that they wanted to spare us, the children, to protect us from everything for which we ourselves could have been exposed to attacks. My mother and father thought it better if they did not speak at all about certain questions.⁴¹

In the initial years the discrimination against the children included denying them admission into youth organizations (pioneers, young workers), membership of which was compulsory for their contemporaries. Baroness Éva Bánffy's great sorrow in her childhood was that she could not be accepted as a pioneer: "What hurt me awfully as a child, and in this, too, I felt excluded, was that I was not a normal child."⁴² The humane teacher, seeing Éva's despair, helped her by making her an honorary pioneer: she received a red ribbon, and was allowed to take part in the assemblies and activities, "and the satisfaction of being allowed to be with the others meant more to me than anything else."⁴³

According to Erving Goffman's typology, "tribal stigmas" form one type of stigmatization; these – like race, nationality and religious affiliation – are inherited through family descent and infect, "taint," every member of the family.⁴⁴ A fundamental trait of stigmatized persons is that whoever they come into contact with will treat them differently throughout their whole lives from those without stigmas; they are not judged in the same way as "normal" people are.⁴⁵ Stigmatized persons gradually amass experiences of the consequences of this situation and protect themselves against the negative reactions of the environment. The majority of children born into aristocratic families had to face this fact when they left the protective family nest and entered school. There many confronted not only the official image of the enemy but also the negative reactions of their contemporary surroundings. "Then in the secondary school I became an outcast once and for all, a kind of constant class enemy," Éva Bánffy added bitterly to her earlier

account.⁴⁶ She had been a successful athlete, setting national records in the 100- and 200-meter backstroke, and was fourth in the world. Despite this, the coach of the swimming section dismissed her from the team because of her ancestry and she was never rehabilitated; after the competition she was removed from the hotel as well, and a girl who had not even competed stood on the podium.⁴⁷ She would have liked to be a kindergarten teacher, but this dream of hers never came true, because she was not accepted into the training college because of her name. Despite this unsuccessful life, she summed up her attitude thus: "But however things were, we did not beg like people today. You clench your teeth, [take] a deep breath and move on – this is what we were taught: bearing."⁴⁸ Her brother added, with gallows humor: "If you like, we were pushing the wagon of Communism, because we worked honestly."⁴⁹

In the 1960s the situation improved somewhat, but later the dictatorship associated with the name of Ceaușescu introduced measures that afflicted the entire population, which by the 1980s had resulted in the direst situation even in comparison to the other socialist countries. As a result of the drastic measures, the misery and the harassments by the secret police – which the regime's rampant nationalism and the oppression of the minorities compounded – many members of the former Transylvanian aristocracy who remained in the country chose to emigrate, if they could do so. According to a survey in 1987 there were only 84 members of 21 aristocratic families (11 comital and 10 baronial) living in Transylvania, mainly in Kolozsvár and Marosvásárhely.⁵⁰

But just how did these "aristocratic" or "noble" themes appear in these ego-documents?⁵¹ It is interesting to examine how much – if at all – the peculiar (high) noble norms and forms of conduct, as well as a peculiar mentality, are reflected in these self-stylizations. After all, the autobiographies are the expressions of group affiliation as well, the results of a social practice that determines how the members of a certain group in a certain time period "must" present and describe their lives.⁵² In the case of the nobles, it is well known that a notion of honor, connected to rank as a means of social distinction *vis-*

à-vis other social groups, played a very important role for a long time. When reading the analyzed texts, it is not difficult to find such specifically (high) noble norms and forms of conduct. I would like to convey what I mean with a few quotations:

"The centuries-old mentality remained: in other words one should not be concerned only with the problems of everyday life. The reflexes remained. As soon as I glance at a stranger, I immediately know from the way he greets me, shakes hands, holds a knife and fork, that he is not someone of the old type, that he was not properly raised."⁵³

"I believe that the aristocracy left home with a head start... The aristocrat brought honor from home. This was natural; no one expected praise for it."⁵⁴

"All of them endured their fate with honor and honesty [...] they bore this humiliation without complaint or grumbling."⁵⁵

"Backbone, bearing and honesty were of primary importance in our family. This far exceeded the material concerns..." says Béla Bethlen's grandson about his grandfather, who had astonished him in his childhood by his ability to discipline himself even while asleep.⁵⁶

Or as the great-grandson of Prime Minister Kálmán Tisza wrote about his father, "Although the regime had deprived him of his material goods in 1949, no one could take away his spiritual wealth and virtues."⁵⁷

"Yet they were unable to destroy us so much that we could not preserve our spiritual nobility. I, too, was brought up by my parents in Marosvásárhely to believe that my name obliged me to display moral purity and national-mindedness..."⁵⁸ "My father brought up his children to believe that indeed there exists at all times and everywhere a moral standard by which we are obliged to measure our actions. No matter how much the world contradicts this, we must respect the eternal values. These include honor, homeland, family, justice, love, faith, tradition and refinement. I call that person who holds the abovementioned values to be his guiding ideal and compass a noble of the spirit," claims the young author, Kata Tisza, born in 1980.⁵⁹

A sociological survey recently conducted in Hungary accords well with this. According to the survey, the self-definition of young people with an aristocratic identity emphatically contains a kind of particular upbringing, behavior and a value system that are defined by Christianity, the family past, conservative thinking, love of homeland and the obligations stemming from these.⁶⁰ "There is no resurrection without tradition," says Baron Miklós Bánffy, whose great-grandfather was prime minister and father was minister of agriculture.⁶¹ International research also confirms this same thing. Honor, bearing, obligation, sacrifice and chivalry are "noble topoi," which we may understand "much rather as linguistic stylizations," in which the group in a constantly discursive manner constantly recreates itself.⁶²

In summary we may state that despite the tragic events of the twentieth century, the traumas experienced, and the disappearance of their world, those involved attempted with their narratives to establish coherence in their lives as well. In the striving for coherence the values and ethos considered to be "(high) noble" formed an important foothold. Countess Éva Bethlen summed this up with the following words: "Perhaps it was preordained thus. Of course I look back with pain, since one could have lived more nicely, better, more usefully, but at the same time with great pride as well, because we proved that we survived it while remaining human."⁶³

Notes

- 1 The research was supported by the Hungarian National Research Fund (OTKA) project no. 83521.
- 2 In Hungary and Romania several interviews and memoir volumes have appeared, but in contrast to Germany, for example, specialist literature on the subject is lacking. In the successor states of the Monarchy interest in the subject has increased somewhat. A few titles are as follows: Hannes Stekl, "Österreichs Adel im 20. Jahrhundert," in Hannes Stekl, *Adel und Bürgertum in der Habsburgermonarchie 18. bis 20. Jahrhundert*. Sozial- und wirtschaftshistorische Studien (Vienna and Munich, 2004), pp. 101–139; Zdeněk Hazdra, Václav

Horčíčka and Jan Županič, eds., *Šlechta střední Evropy v konfrontaci s totalitními režimy dvacátého století. Der Adel Mitteleuropas in Konfrontation mit den totalitären Regimen des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Prague, FFUK, 2011).

- 3 On the collective memory of the various groups, see Frances Pine, Deema Kaneff and Haldis Haukanes, eds., *Memory, Politics and Religion. The Past Meets the Present in Europe* (Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia, vol. 4) (Münster, 2004); Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, eds., *Contested Pasts. The Politics of Memory* (Routledge Studies in Memory and Narrative) (London and New York, 2003). "Underpinning contested and changing histories, and the tension between public and hidden memories and commemorations, is a struggle for power. Conflicting memories are not only about what 'really' happened. They are also about identity claims, identity formation and identity politics. In the most basic sense, legitimization of and through memory is an ideological tool. Through mutual understandings and hence confirmation of particular shared pasts, people build their identities and make their social relations. By contesting the pasts remembered by others, they mark these others as different and may exclude them from various social, political or economic relationships." "Introduction," in Pine, Kaneff and Haukanes, eds., *Memory, Politics and Religion*, pp. 3–4.
- 4 On the position of the aristocracy in Hungary between the two world wars, see Gábor Gyáni and György Kövér, *Magyarország társadalomtörténete a reformkortól a második világháborúig* [A Social History of Hungary from the Age of Reform to the Second World War], 2nd ed. (Budapest, 2001), pp. 223–236; Levente Püski, "Arisztokrácia a 20. századi Magyarországon. I–II" [Aristocracy in Twentieth-Century Hungary I–II], *Korunk* 9–10 (2008), at <http://www.korunk.ro/?q=node/8&ev=2008&honap=9&cikk=9278>, <http://www.korunk.ro/?q=node/8&ev=2008&honap=10&cikk=9328> (May 15, 2012)
- 5 On the agrarian reform, see Dumitru Șandru, *Reforma agrară din 1921 în România* [The Agrarian Reform of 1921 in Romania] (Bucharest, 1975), pp. 42–79.
- 6 Ildikó Marosi, *Örökre hagyott beszélgetés gróf Teleki Mihállyal* [A Conversation for Posterity with Count Mihály Teleki], 3rd ed. (Csikszereďa, 2009), pp. 49–53.
- 7 Gabriella Kornis, ...*Örizz...*, *és én is örízlek téged* [Watch over Me... and I Will Watch over You, Too] (Kolozsvár, 2006), p. 10.

- 8 Mária Lázár, *Jó volt élni* [It Was Good to Be Alive], edited by Hella Sessoms-Sztojanovics, private publication (1999), p. 73.
- 9 Marosi, *Őrökbe hagyott beszélgetés gróf Teleki Mihállyal*, p. 100.
- 10 Kornis, ...*Őrizz...*, és én is őrizlek téged, p. 76.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 112.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 114.
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 117–118.
- 14 Count Sándor Degenfeld-Schonburg, *Elmélkedések* [Ponderings], edited by Gyöngy Kovács Kiss (Kolozsvár, 2008), p. 25. Later on he himself inserted the private letter into his memoirs.
- 15 Kornis, ...*Őrizz...*, és én is őrizlek téged, pp. 125 and 129.
- 16 Edit Szerdahelyi, "Emigráció, mint a trauma ismétlése" [Emigration as the Repeat of Trauma], in Dénes Lukács, ed., *Irányzatok és kutatások a mai magyar pszichoanalízisben. Magyar Pszichoanalitikus Egyesület 1994. évi konferenciája* [Trends and Research in Contemporary Hungarian Psychoanalysis. The 1994 Conference of the Hungarian Psychoanalytical Association] (Budapest, 1995), p. 112.
- 17 Albert Wass, "Erdélyt nem lehet elfelejteni" [It is Impossible to Forget Transylvania], in Gyöngy Kovács Kiss, ed., *Álló és mozgóképek. Vázlat az erdélyi főnemességről (Visszaemlékezések, felfigyélések, beszélgetések, tanulmányok)* [Static and Moving Images. A Sketch of the Transylvanian High Nobility (Reminiscences, Notes, Conversations, Studies)], 2nd ed. (Kolozsvár, 2007), p. 229.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 Monika Wienfort, "Adlige Handlungsspielräume und neue Adelstypen in der 'Klassischen Moderne' (1880–1930)," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 33 (2007) 3: 419.
- 20 Degenfeld-Schonburg, *Elmélkedések*, p. 23.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- 22 According to this decree, the goods, especially real estate, banks and enterprises, belonging to Germans and Hungarians from Romania were taken into state administration, on the basis of declaring all members of these ethnic communities to be "declared enemies."
- 23 Marosi, *Őrökbe hagyott beszélgetés gróf Teleki Mihállyal*, pp. 66–67.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 104.
- 25 Countess Katalin Bethlen, Mrs. Károly Stipsicz, "Stipsicz Károlyné gróf Bethlen Katalin visszaemlékezése" [Countess Katalin Bethlen's Memoirs], in Kovács Kiss, ed., *Álló és mozgóképek*, p. 38.

- 26 Béla Bethlen, *Észak-Erdély kormánybiztosa voltam* [I Was the Government Commissioner for Northern Transylvania], edited by Ignác Romsics (Budapest, 1989), p. 274.
- 27 Gabriella Kornis, "Az Anjou-kárpit" [The Anjou Carpet], in Kovács Kiss, ed., *Álló és mozgóképek*, p. 118.
- 28 Kornis, ...*Őrizz...*, és én is őrizlek téged, p. 96.
- 29 Countess Katalin Basu Roy Chowdhury of Ulpur Mikes, "Visszatérés a zabolai Mikes-gyökerekhez" [Return to the Mikes Roots in Zabolai], in Kovács Kiss, ed., *Álló és mozgóképek*, p. 126.
- 30 *Ibid.*
- 31 Count Kálmán Tisza, "A Tisza család (borosjenői és szegedi gróf)" [The Tisza Family (Count of Borosjenő and Szeged)] in Kovács Kiss, ed., *Álló és mozgóképek*, pp. 192–193.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 127.
- 33 Ferenc Erős, "Psychische Spätfolgen des Holocausts. Forschungsergebnisse und -erfahrungen," in Brigitte Mihok, ed., *Ungarn und der Holocaust. Kollaboration, Rettung und Trauma* (Dokumente – Texte – Materialien. Veröffentlichung vom Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung der Technischen Universität Berlin, Bd. 56) (Berlin, 2005), p. 133.
- 34 Basu Roy Chowdhury of Ulpur Mikes, "Visszatérés a zabolai Mikes-gyökerekhez," in Kovács Kiss, ed., *Álló és mozgóképek*, p. 128.
- 35 Degenfeld-Schonburg, *Elmélkedések*, p. 34.
- 36 Countess Éva Bethlen, "Countess Éva Bethlen, Szentkirályi Gyuláné," in Gabriella Kornis, ed., *Elődök és utódok. Erdélyi főnemések a XX. században* [Ancestors and Descendants. Transylvanian High Nobles in the Twentieth Century] (Budapest, 2002), p. 128.
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 Countess Ilona Bethlen, Mrs. László Polányi, "Mikor és kit zsákmányolhatott volna ki egy fiatal lány?" (Visszaemlékezés-részlet) [When and Whom Could a Young Girl Have Exploited? (A Memoir Excerpt)], in Kovács Kiss, ed., *Álló és mozgóképek*, p. 151.
- 39 Marosi, *Őrökbe hagyott beszélgetés gróf Teleki Mihállyal*, p. 108; Kálmán Tisza and his son, István Tisza, were prime ministers of Hungary in the Dualist period.
- 40 *Ibid.*, pp. 109–110.
- 41 Countess Kata Tisza, "Tartson ki, irónó!" [Persevere, Author!], in János Adonyi Szlancs, ed., *Arisztokraták ma* [Aristocrats Today], vol. I (Budapest, 2007), p. 164.

- 42 "Összeszorítod a század, mély lélegzet és méz tovább." Bárány Bányó Évával és Bányó Tamással beszélget Kiss András" ["You Clench Your Teeth, Take a Deep Breath and Move On." András Kiss Speaks with Baroness Éva Bányó and Tamás Bányó], in Kovács Kiss, ed., *Álló és mozgóképek*, p. 82.
- 43 *Ibid.*
- 44 Erving Goffman, *Stigma. Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York, 1963), cited in Zsuzsanna Körösi and Adrienne Molnár, *Mit einem Geheimnis leben. Die Schicksale der Kinder der Verurteilten von 1956* (Studien zur Geschichte Ost- und Mitteleuropas, Bd. 4) (Herne, 2005), p. 95.
- 45 *Ibid.*
- 46 "Összeszorítod a század, mély lélegzet és méz tovább," in Kovács Kiss, ed., *Álló és mozgóképek*, p. 82.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 83.
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 *Ibid.*, p. 84.
- 50 János József Gudenus and László Szentirmay, *Összetört címerek. A magyar arisztokrácia sorsa és az 1945 utáni megpróbáltatások (bevezetés egy szociológiai vizsgálathoz)* [Broken Family Crests. The Fate of the Hungarian Aristocracy and the Post-1945 Tribulations (Introduction to a Sociological Examination)] (Budapest, 1989), p. 419.
- 51 For the content of *Adelikeit*, see Eckart Conze and Monika Wienfort, "Einleitung. Themen und Perspektiven historischer Adelsforschung zum 19. und 20. Jahrhundert," in Eckart Conze and Monika Wienfort, eds., *Adel und Moderne. Deutschland im europäischen Vergleich im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Cologne and Weimar, 2004), p. 12.
- 52 Volker Depkat, "Autobiographie und die soziale Konstruktion von Wirklichkeit," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 29 (2003) 3: 442.
- 53 Marosi, *Örökbe hagyott beszélgetés gróf Teleki Mihállyal*, p. 112.
- 54 "Összeszorítod a század, mély lélegzet és méz tovább," in Kovács Kiss, ed., *Álló és mozgóképek*, p. 83.
- 55 Ferenc Harmath, "Ismerető a Hallerekről" [An Introduction to the Hallers], in Kovács Kiss, ed., *Álló és mozgóképek*, pp. 218–219. These ideas appear in almost all (even those not mentioned here) interviews and memoirs.
- 56 Count Farkas Bethlen, "Csizma, kantár, gerinc" [Boots, Bridle, Backbone], in Adonyi Sztancs, ed., *Arisztokraták ma*, p. 26.

- 57 Count Kálmán Tisza, "A Tisza család (borosjenői és szegedi gróf)," in Kovács Kiss, ed., *Álló és mozgóképek*, p. 194.
- 58 Tisza, "Tartson ki, irónő!" in Adonyi Sztancs, ed., *Arisztokraták ma*, p. 164.
- 59 *Ibid.*, p. 167.
- 60 Éva Kézdy Sztáray, *Egy eltűnt réteg nyomában. Egykori arisztokrata családok leszámazottai a mai Magyarországon* [On the Trail of a Vanished Stratum. The Descendants of Former Aristocratic Families in Today's Hungary] (Budapest, 2009), pp. 189–191.
- 61 Miklós Bánffy, "Nem esküsznek szégyenre" [They Do Not Take Oaths on a Carpet], in Adonyi Sztancs, ed., *Arisztokraták ma*, p. 217.
- 62 Conze and Wienfort, "Einleitung," in Conze and Wienfort, eds., *Adel und Moderne*, p. 12.
- 63 Count Éva Bethlen, "Countess Éva Bethlen, Szentkirályi Gyuláné," in Kornis, ed., *Elődök és utódok*, p. 128.